(c) the steps Government is taking to help NRIs when they die outside the country especially the people of Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (c) The requisite details are being collected and would be laid on the table of the House.

Indians languishing in jails

498. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a number of Indian nationals are languishing in jails in Gulf countries who are victims of recruitment agencies in the country;

(b) if so, the number of cases reported;

(c) the details of the steps taken for the release of these people; and

(d) the details of steps taken against the fraud agencies and to ensure the safety of the emigrants?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (d) As reported by the Indian Missions in the Gulf countries, cases of Indian nationals who are victims of Recruitment Agencies being in jails have not come to their notice.

Computerisation of panchayats

499. SHRIMATI HEMA MALINI: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government has recommended for computerization of around 2.5 lakh panchayats during the next three years;

(b) if so, the details of such panchayats and the cost at which it would be implemented, State-wise; and

(c) by when the rural people can expect to avail of computer facility?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) Yes, Madam. The Government has proposed a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for e-governance in Panchayati Raj institutions (e-PRI). The proposed scheme will bring about improved service delivery through the Panchayats and enable greater accountability of government to the community through use of ICT. Department of Information Technology has included e-Governance for Panchayats as a Mission Mode Project (MMP) under National e-Governance Programme (NeGP).

Keeping in view the strategic importance of computerization at the Gram Panchayat level, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj had constituted an Expert Group in June 2007 under the Chairmanship of Director General, National Informatics Centre to assess the current and future Information Technology (IT) programmes of the Ministry, to recommend on the most cost-effective technologies for reaching IT to the Gram Panchayats, the use of IT for effectively building capacities of Panchayati Raj Institutions through distance learning; and the cost

implications of the recommendations. A summary of the key recommendations of the Expert Group is given in the Statement (*See* below). Based on the recommendations of the Expert Group, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has formulated a Centrally Sponsored Schemed on e-governance for PRIs. In the proposed scheme, all Village and Block Panchayats are to be provided with ICT infrastructure (Computer, Printer, UPS and Web Camera) with broadband connectivity. Appropriate software applications will also be deployed so as to enable Panchayats meet service needs of various stakeholders such as citizens, States/UTs and Central Government Building capacities of PRIs to absorb and internalize ICT interventions through e-PRI is also proposed. The Service kiosks are proposed to be located in Panchayat Ghars or any other place available within the Panchayat area. The scheme is expected to be rolled-out with in the next three years. The exact cost estimates will be worked out on the basis of Detailed Project Reports received from the States/UTs.

Statement

Recommendations of the Expert Group on IT programmes of MoPR

- Given the varied levels of functional devolution to Panchayats and availability of other associated infrastructure in various States, the Group has recommended that the Panchayats should be graded into high, medium and low categories of Panchayats based on their overall preparedness and work out different plans for each of the categories. Such an approach will encourage and motivate the States to work towards greater devolution to the Panchayats while ensuring that the digital divide is not widened.

- The Group has recommended provision of computers and other associated infrastructure to two-thirds of Gram Panchayats and Block Panchayats.

- Besides computing infrastructure, the Group has also recommended provision of Internet connectivity, preferably through broadband, and manpower to enable the Panchayats to effectively utilize the infrastructure.

- The Expert Group recommended that the choice of technology should be driven by the need to bridge the digital divide and ensure that the society enjoys the freedom to harness the benefits of the technology. Accordingly, open technology, which includes open standards, open source and other similar open initiatives have been recommended as the basis for technology options as such a choice would result in low cost, freedom from vendor lock-in and transparent interoperability standards.

- While the Group recommended Open Technology, recognizing the existence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) infrastructure in some of the States, due consideration has been accorded by the Group to ensure compatibility with the other existing systems.

- The Group has accorded due autonomy to States in defining and developing their own application software to address State specific functionalities while at the same time recommending the development of certain core common functions centrally to interoperability, speedier and effective implementation of the project.

- The Group also recommended the adoption of multi-mode training interventions using ICTs and satellite-based technologies.

Powers to local bodies

500. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is envisaging any new programmes to give powers to local bodies in implementing the State and Centrally devised developmental programmes;

(b) how many programmes under the Bharat Nirman scheme are implemented with the help of Panchayats; and

(c) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) Article 243 G of the Constitution already provides for devolution of powers and authority to the Panchayats so as to enable them to function as institutions of self-government with respect to—

I. making plans for economic development and social justice, and

II. implementation of plans and schemes as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

Similarly, the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 also provides for devolution of functional and financial powers to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). Accordingly, it is for State Legislatures and State Governments to devolve appropriate functions, functionaries and funds to PRIs and ULBs. Nevertheless, it has been the endeavor of the Union Government to impress upon State Governments the need to scientifically and simultaneously devolve functions functionaries and funds to local bodies to enable them to function as institutions of self-government.

(b) and (c) There are six components of the Bharat Nirman Programme.

(i) **Rural Housing** Programme is being implemented through Indira Awas Yojana (IAY). Under Bharat Nirman Programme, 60 lakh houses are envisaged to be constructed during four years *i.e.* from 2005-06 to 2008-2009. Under the scheme, PRIs Play an important role in the selection of beneficiaries. Gram Sabha does selection of beneficiaries from the eligible BPL households/Permanent IAY waitlist, wherever it has been finalized. To ensure transparency in the selection of beneficiaries, Gram Panchayats are also instructed to finalize Permanent IAY waitlist and publish the same